

ON
TRAC
OFF
ROAD



JEREMY MARTIN



— DAYTONA 250SX WINNER —

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Photo: Jeff Kardas



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Looking for 50...

Jeffrey Herlings is already starting to look quite lonely in the 2016 MX2 World Championship. Perfect after two rounds and with Dylan Ferrandis unable to look over a dislocated shoulder Herlings seemingly faces little opposition. Win number 49 came in Thailand for the twenty-one year old and it's likely the half ton will arrive at Valkenswaard on Easter Monday; a track where he is unbeaten since 2010

Photo by Ray Archer





MotoGP

Who will the light shine on...?

Qatar continued to raise questions and permutations for MotoGP after the final test with little indication who could hold the upper hand after the 22 laps and 73.5 miles of the opening Grand Prix on March 20th. Will The Doctor reign again?

Photo by Monster Energy/Milagro







AMA-SX

Gallic brace...

Daytona was a special Supercross fixture and one that featured a layout the subject of some derision. Across the soft dirt the French – in the forms of Christophe Pourcel and Marvin Musquin – made quite an impression. 377 could not stretch his fast form into the Main with an early crash but 25 clinched a third podium of an impressive 450SX season

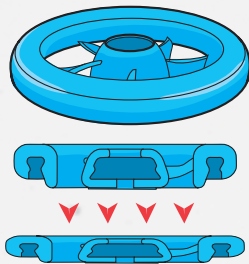
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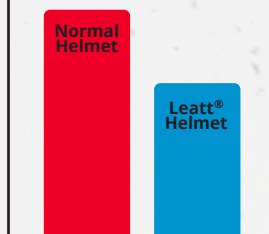
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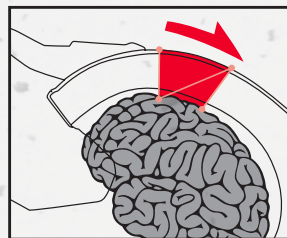
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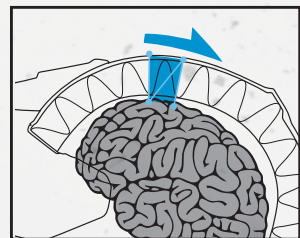
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MX

GRAND PRIX OF THAILAND

SUPHAN BURI • MARCH 6th • Rnd 2 of 18

MXGP winner: Romain Febvre, Yamaha

MX2 winner: Jeffrey Herlings, KTM



FEBVRE FRIES 'EM

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

THE FIRST FOR FEBVRE AT ANOTHER NEW VENUE FOR THE THAI GRAND PRIX AS HERLINGS CONTINUES HIS MX2 WRATH. TALKING POINTS ON AND OFF THE TRACK AT UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE HOTTEST MXGP FIXTURES OF 2016

MXGP THAI



There was probably a point after the first race when Romain Febvre wanted to get out of the 'kitchen'. The World Champion pushed himself hard in the near forty-degree Thai heat to dispose of Red Bull KTM's Tony Cairoli and notch his maiden win of the season on the way to his first double, fifteenth podium in a row and fourth victory from the last six in MXGP. On the toughest stage and across a new hard-pack, rutted track that is difficult to summarise in words (let alone traverse at speed) Febvre chucked his beret into the ring to renew his credentials as one of the very top contenders for the 2016 series that still has many trips, episodes and racing conditions to plough through in the next seven months.

Yamaha helped their rider into the cold plunge pool that many of the Grand Prix riders were using in the paddock as they tried their best to acclimatise to temperatures double those found in Qatar the previous week, increased humidity and a climate another world from the months, weeks and miles totalled on European tracks during the winter months. The treatment had the right effect as Febvre came out roaring in the second moto and put the rave beyond dispute from the second corner.

Suphan Buri was another new venue for the Thai Grand Prix – its third in just four editions of the race – and although apparently an improvement over the inappropriate and ill-received Nakhonchaisri site in 2015 still attracted disdain and grumbles from the small GP collective in attendance, Pole sitter Ben Townley particularly vocal in his now infamous assessment during the press conference on Saturday. The numbers depleted further with MX2 Qatar GP leader and second-placed finisher at Losail, Dylan Ferrandis crashing out of the programme on Saturday and flying home with a dislocated shoulder. Watering of the hard-pack again coming under scrutiny and prompted a discussion between part-time rider Rep Rui Gonçalves and the athletes on Saturday evening that led to changes and extra track care that caused Febvre to speak out in praise of the work done for Sunday. "We had a meeting yesterday and I think the track was much better today, so I hope this is a direction we can keep," he said.

A tricky weekend off the track and also on it. Crashes were had by Gautier Paulin, Glenn Coldenhoff and Townley in the first moto and bike rarities for Max Nagl and Cairoli. Positives were enjoyed by Jeremy Van Horebeek (a first podium, although the Belgian looked totally drained), Shaun Simpson (solid although could maybe feel a little disappointed with his slide from second to sixth in the second moto), Tim Gajser (backing up his Qatar speed with more strength and composure) and Townley (a deserved and impressive runner-up in the second moto).

In MX2 Jeffrey Herlings was in imperious form to be able to fly back to Europe with a perfect scorecard after the first two outings. There was a near-miss for the Dutchman early in the second moto where he was almost pitched over the bars cresting a jump ("I think the suspension bottomed out and I almost went over the bars. It is hard to explain but I felt like it was not really my fault but then who's fault is it? We kept it safe. The bike is super, super fast but we can still improve a little bit. I still haven't had too much testing with the new bike and I need a bit more time, especially on tracks like this") but otherwise there was little contest. Max Anstie crashed spectacularly into the advertising boards in the first moto (a wet track again?) and made up for his 'off' with a last lap attack on Team Suzuki's Jeremy Seewer for second place in moto two. Seewer was again quick as he'd been in Qatar and Alex Tonkov was Yamaha's best representative for his first silverware in blue in third place.

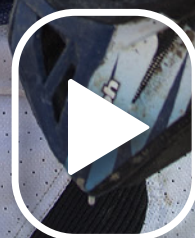
A two weekend break means the start of many national series commitments for riders before what will be a level playing for a great deal of the paddock in the sand of Valkenswaard on Easter Monday.





Again Tim Gajser caused a stir. The 2015 Thai Grand Prix was one of the Slovenian's worst meetings but on this occasion he turned a second MXGP appearance into a second trophy. Dylan Ferrandis has surgery on a dislocated shoulder in Europe on Tuesday morning meaning the Frenchman (below) is likely to face a hefty absence from the 2016 series. Suphan Buri was hard work for many, including Max Anstie (99) but Jeremy Van Horebeek's podium (his first of '16 and only third since 2014) was the definition of 'well-earned'





PLAY



MXGP THAI



A heavy crash for Pauls Jonass kept the Latvian away from a second consecutive podium finish on the 250SX-F





Contrasting fortunes at Suzuki as Kevin Strijbos (below left) battled more arm-pump misery while Jeremy Seewer took his first MX2 spoils of the year on the re-worked RM-Z250

More drag racing from Herlings who claimed his 2016 race bike was “super, super fast”. The Dutchman is already racking up the numbers again in MX2 and seems like his pre-season prediction that only he can be the author of his defeat looks to be spot-on so far...







MXGP THAI

Much better showings for Townley and Nagl while Shaun Simpson burst into the top two during the second moto...





CLASSIFICATION & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MXGP OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Romain Febvre, FRA	Yamaha
2	Tim Gajser, SLO	Honda
3	Jeremy Van Horebeek, BEL	Yamaha
4	Evgeny Bobryshev, RUS	Honda
5	Tony Cairoli, ITA	KTM

MX2 OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Jeffrey Herlings, NED	KTM
2	Jeremy Seewer, SUI	Suzuki
3	Aleksandr Tonkov, RUS	Yamaha
4	Benoit Paturel, FRA	Yamaha
5	Pauls Jonass, LAT	KTM

MXGP STANDINGS AFTER 2 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Romain Febvre	92
2 Tim Gajser	86
3 Evgeny Bobryshev	74
4 Jeremy Van Horebeek	68
5 Tony Cairoli	64

MX2 STANDINGS AFTER 2 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Jeffrey Herlings	100
2 Jeremy Seewer	74
3 Aleksandr Tonkov	70
4 Pauls Jonass	68
5 Petar Petrov	56



TACKLING THE BIG Q...

By Adam Wheeler

There is a slimmer wrap Thailand in this issue on account of the Grand Prix being the first I've missed since the opening round of the 2001 FIM Motocross World Championship. It did feel a little strange to actually watch MXGP on TV after arriving back from Qatar and the first part of the MotoGP test but the time difference didn't work out too badly for a Sunday of words, work and thoughts on round two of eighteen. From the riders I communicated with before, during and since the Suphan Buri inauguration and thanks to detailed coverage like that provided by the guys from www.mxvice.com it seems that Ben Townley's frank and honest evaluation about the new Thai facility not being up to world championship standard was one of the talking points of the weekend (as well as Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo's startling rebuke during what should have been a positive press conference about MXGP finding new Asian territory thanks to an agreement that the series will go to Indonesia for the next three years).

Whether Townley was right or wrong about his judgement on the circuit (which apparently was better than the scrappy temporary effort at Nakhonchaisri in 2015 but then via the TV looked dusty and uninspiring) the fact that he wanted to express his opinion should not be slammed or derided. The New Zealander could be looking at a single season of glory before deciding where next to take his career or maybe another year or two at best and therefore might have no qualms about fluffing a few feathers. It is unlikely a younger rider with aspirations for GP success will be so freely vocal but Townley has earned, and demands, respect for his achievements, professionalism and his articulacy on matters on the sport. Just five minutes in his

company will make anyone realise that the thirty year old Kiwi has a rounded and determined view on many aspects of the sport.

Ben could have a point about Qatar and Thailand not fitting the bill for Grand Prix in terms of fans, tradition, atmosphere and infrastructure or even a suitable racing course but, as with many things, it is not quite so black and white. The championship goes to places like Qatar for three reasons: the fees, support and organisation by the QMMF (understandably unmatched by any other local promoter), the chance to show that MXGP is geographically spreading its wings (we have Latvian and Bulgaria riders on the podium after Grands Prix in those respective countries starting in the noughties) and the novelty of a night race supported by the pleasant climate away from Europe. Thailand has a passionate and zealous figurehead, Kraitos Wongsawan, who continues to find local council backing to bring MXGP to the country and the same criteria applies: Asia is a prosperous market for motorcycle sport and bike brands, and attaches onto the back of the trip east to Qatar in terms of scheduling and logistics.

Throw into that offering the questions of whether the event is organised well, marketed well and whether long-term roots for Grand Prix motocross can exist and there is a lot to weigh up. If Youthstream were simply and only treating MXGP as a money-making exercise then you'd see less races (less staff overheads), less investment in TV production, less infrastructure, less scouring the world for potential new partners and backers. Like everyone in the paddock they are not in it purely for the fun or for the passion and I still believe there must be a way the teams – especially those at satellite status



thus potentially adding another ten-odd riders into the gate – can be helped as MXGP continues a transition to a global ranging series. But jetting MXGP around the globe cannot just be about money. It is also about politics, and an attempt to spread the reach of the sport. It is something Supercross would undoubtedly achieve as a ‘world championship’ if it left U.S. shores for even two-three international trips.

There are areas where the powers-that-be want the sport to touch the realms of something like MotoGP but these are pipe dreams in terms of the widescale interest there is in each respective championship and the large disparity when it comes to the sale of TV rights; the main financial locomotive that pushes MotoGP. Youthstream will always have the underlying justification – and it is a good one, supported by all the manufacturers – that they want the sport to grow. So how do you do that? More races, more territories and a focussed direction with the ‘brand’. All in the hope for more coverage, more (new) fans, more (new) sponsors. Then they pray that these fresh locations actually have a stage that warrants MXGP. Qatar is a proven formula and the QMMF have made upgrades with their lighting and could go to the next level with a track redesign and extra preparation for 2017. Thailand has bounced around and perhaps the biggest criticism you can level at the event is an absence of quality through a lack of stability. You can only wonder how the well-received Si Racha circuit (from 2013 and ‘14) would be now after four Grands Prix and with an established date on the calendar. Youthstream and the likes of Kraitos have to be commended for taking MXGP to Thailand and despite assurances, promises and status checks there is only so much control to be had over the course of a first-run event like was seen at Suphan Buri.

The sport has managed to arrive to these countries which is a feat in itself. Now the next step is to see how they can be made better and how attendances can be increased (this is relevant particularly in Qatar’s case).

Ben Townley (who tried to bring MXGP to New Zealand don’t forget and got as far as applications for a government grant) raised a question that was on many people’s minds and lips at Suphan Buri and rather than tackling it with emotion it would be revelatory if the process behind why a Grand Prix exists and what Youthstream’s mission statement for the sport involves would come to light. I think it would make for some interesting and enlightening reading and make people see that it is not easy trying to tick all the boxes in creating a memorable event that could potentially happen again and create some legacy.

Watching MXGP on TV was actually a fruitful exercise. It was both spectacular and limiting and very drawn out. I still firmly believe that if the sport has to fully embrace TV as a way to grow a following (numerically as well as financially) then the broadcast has to be one moto. Run the first race on a Saturday, for the trackside fans, at the same length for full championship points and then the ‘Grand Prix moto’ on Sunday with the order determining the podium and the winner and is nicely tied with a bow for a TV audience. An awkward situation could arise whereby a champion is declared on a Saturday but then the TV production would focus on the Grand Prix solely and the last round/moto could even carry double points to surmount that hurdle. It was great to see all four motos in HD on Eurosport on Sunday but I question whether that format can really endure and take MXGP where it wants to go in a hurry.



ALPINESTARS

Alpinestars head a little bit of a boot special in this OTOR and their D71 is a special edition version of their flagship Tech 10 model celebrating last weekend's ninth round of the Monster Energy AMA SX series and 45 years since Daytona gave birth to the discipline of supercross as we now know it. AS claim the D71 adds protection, performance and more style to their 2016 boot line-up and the green, white and black colours are the main features over the standard Tech 10 and represent something of a slim-down on their RV2 special presented two years ago. This CE certified boot has a raft of technical features and is a melting pot of small innovations and multi-material construction. Add the look and the inner ankle brace and for many riders the Tech 10 is the reference point for the segment.









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AMA-SX

DAYTONA

INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY · MARCH 5th · R

450SX winner: Eli Tomac, Kawasaki

250SX East winner: Jeremy Martin, Yamaha


DAYTONA
SUPERCROSS
by  **HONDA**

By Steve Matthes, Photos by Simon Cudby

TOMAC FINALLY

ELI TOMAC BREAKS HIS KAWASAKI DUCK AROUND A DAYTONA TRACK THAT WILL NOT RANK AS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR OF THE YEAR. READ ON FOR STEVE MATTHES' TAKE ON ROUND NINE OF THE MONSTER ENERGY AMA SERIES

Right when Monster Energy Kawasaki's Eli Tomac took the halfway flag at Daytona in the 450SX main event, the entire 17 round AMA Supercross series had reached the halfway point. And it's a series that has lost a bit of its lustre when the leader, Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey, has a 39-point lead. Still, there's plenty to talk about and round nine in Daytona has many juicy subplots to touch on...

-After Tomac took that halfway flag he continued to lead the rest of the way for his first win in the '16 series and there's no doubt that a huge sigh of relief immediately followed. Tomac's not been his normal 'superman' self in the first year of a big bucks Kawasaki deal. Whether it's the slow start due to the double shoulder surgeries, adjustment to the new bike (Tomac is notorious for always testing) or whatever, Eli's sole podium in eight races is not something that neither he nor the team expected at this point. I had a senior Kawasaki manager tell me a couple of weeks ago that he wasn't worried about Eli, that they're both in this for the long haul but that yes, it's gone worse than he had expected so far.

"This is something we've been working towards all season," said Tomac. "For being off the bike for as long I was, I think I was expecting too much of myself right away. Daytona is a race I've been looking forward to all year and it's an event everyone wants to win. I was feeling great all day and it showed as I qualified first, won my heat and capping it off with a Main Event win. I couldn't be happier!"

Yeah it's Daytona and yeah it's different than every other supercross on the circuit and yeah Tomac's outdoor prowess was more on display at this race than any other one but Eli deserves full marks for this win. He was the fastest qualifier, he smoked Dungey in the heat and he pretty much had constant pressure from Ryan the entire time. Much like JGR Yamaha's Justin Barcia used an unlikely win last summer at Budds Creek, this victory could do the same for Tomac. The title is long gone but if he can capitalise on this result, then this SX season can be salvaged. Of course this Daytona win also shows us that when the Lucas Oil AMA Pro Motocross championship begins,





Tomac has to be considered the favourite. Berms, ruts, soft dirt and braking bumps seem to agree with the #3.

-Dungey has to be fine with his runner-up spot. One mistake by Tomac and he would've taken his sixth win of the year. Dungey's got an incredible 25-race podium streak going on right now going back to last season. He's tied Chad Reed for the longest in the history of supercross and as we said, has this title firmly in hand.

-Dungey's teammate Marvin Musquin's season has started looking pretty good right? One week after just missing his first 450SX win by five corners, Musquin finished third in Daytona for his second podium in a row. Musquin's rise to prominence in this class from a poor Anaheim 1 has been remarkable [He was getting over a wrist injury though – Ed]. That's three podiums in nine races for the #25 and who wants to bet against the Frenchman being the fifth winner of the series (Jason Anderson, Dungey, Kenny Roczen and now Tomac) in the next few weeks? Great riding by Marv and he's starting to become a factor here.

-In the 250's it was a dramatic main event and in the end, like the 450SX main, the 'outdoor' guy won. Star Yamaha's Jeremy Martin simply wore down leader GEICO Honda's Malcolm Stewart, passed him with three laps left and took off with his first win at round two of the 250SX Eastern Series. Martin seemed to be able to go faster than Stewart but partly due to the track just couldn't get by him. When he did though, he poured it on and showed he was faster. It was great strategy by Martin and there was no panic when he couldn't pass Malcolm early on.

At the opening round last week, Martin's starts were absolutely terrible and they cost him a podium spot. Jeremy, like Tomac, is much more at home with an outdoor course but this has got to help him going forward from here. Jeremy's been a bit of a mystery indoors so far with a couple of wins (not including Day-

tona) but also some poor performances along the way. In a 30-minute plus two-lap moto the starts aren't as key as they are indoors and Martin's got to show he can nail those, work through traffic before we can think he's going to win this title

-The fastest rider in the 250SX main event was TLD KTM's Justin Hill who rode a terrific race to come from sixth and grab the runner-up spot. Hill was great all day long at the Speedway and showed that if he had gotten a start then he might have been in it for the 25 points. But still holding onto the red plate in the 250SX class was Rockstar Husqvarna's Martin Davalos who all things considered, did well to get Stewart on the last lap for the last spot on the podium. Marty's not an outdoor specialist by any means so this race was considered a test for him and his speed. Davalos has underperformed year-in and year-out in the 250SX series (save for 2013 that saw him in a prime spot to win the title only to have a bike malfunction while practicing rob him of a sure title) but this season, his eleventh in the class, he seems to have figured things out.

He hired ex-pro Tim Ferry this past off-season and Ferry told me (full disclosure, I wrenched for Ferry for five years at Yamaha) that he's had Davalos do less than ever before. Yes, 'less': you read that right. Martin's always trained a lot and when things weren't going right, he would work harder and that isn't always the smartest thing. So far Davalos has won two heat races in two races, gone 1-3 in mains and looks good so far. Ferry's been very positive about Davalos and how much he wants to figure out this SX thing and get into the 450 class. If Marty manages to win this title, he has to move up to the 450 class and what better way to do that than with a title?

As far as Daytona, Davalos had this to say: "Daytona is more of an outdoor race. So there's always a lot of fast guys that show up. I was confident throughout the day, and I felt good. The bike setup was awesome. I'm mostly just trying to stick to my own race, and I think



that's working for me. My heat race was awesome. I should have done a practice start for the main though, because my gate looked a little slippery, and I didn't get the best jump. I rode smart in the main. I was there the entire 15 laps, and put in a hard charge for the final two to salvage third. It's a long championship, and I just have to give my best every weekend."

-The person who didn't give it their best this weekend was multi-time SX and MX champion Ricky Carmichael who's been designing Daytona tracks for a number of years. And they've mostly been pretty good until this weekend. Whether it was all on Carmichael or the speedway folks or maybe the crew that actually builds the track or maybe a combination of all three but the 2016 Daytona track was met with universal dislike.

It was narrow, had way too many switchbacks where the inside ruled, easy obstacles and it didn't provide much passing at all. Riders had to go way outside to use the berms and more

times than not, they were a waste of time. Looking at the lap charts it's amazing how little passing there was outside of Justin Hill's sixth to second and Honda's Cole Seely coming from twenty-first to tenth (but outside of Chad Reed who was miserable all day because of the track, Seely was a much better rider than all those he passed) there just wasn't much going on. The start was highly favourable to those on the inside and it was maybe best summed up by this tweet from GEICO Honda's Justin Bogle after practice:

@justinbogle19 honestly worst track design I've ever raced on

I got a text from a top rider after qualifying who also told me it was the worst track he'd ever raced on and all -in-all, the show suffered from the lack of imagination and routing of the layout.





AMA-SX DAYTONA





Roczen on the gas but his inconsistency with starts remains. Fifth place was a little disappointing for the German. "The track was tough so it was hard to pass," he said. "By the time I had a clear track, there was a big gap to the front that I tried to close but I just ran out of time. We're going to work on the bike a little bit this week to try and get it better. Other than that, I'm going to keep doing what I've been doing."



AMA-SX DAYTONA



Trey Canard is on the comeback path again and was also vocal on the Daytona layout: "I wasn't a huge fan of the track, and I don't think many guys were; it was just too tight and there wasn't a whole lot of room to make passes."



AMA-SX CLASSIFICATION & CHAMPIONSHIP

AMA 450SX RESULT

Riders

1	Eli Tomac, USA	Kawasaki
2	Ryan Dungey, USA	KTM
3	Marvin Musquin, FRA	KTM
4	Jason Anderson, USA	Husqvarna
5	Ken Roczen, GER	Suzuki

AMA 250SX WEST RESULT

Riders

1	Jeremy Martin, USA	Yamaha
2	Justin Hill, USA	KTM
3	Martin Davalos, USA	Husqvarna
4	Malcolm Stewart, USA	Honda
5	Aaron Plessinger, USA	Yamaha

AMA 450SX STANDINGS (AFTER 9 OF 17 ROUNDS)

Riders	Points
1 Ryan Dungey	213
2 Ken Roczen	174
3 James Anderson	164
4 Eli Tomac	154
5 Cole Seely	145

AMA 250SX EAST STANDINGS (AFTER 2 OF 8 ROUNDS)

Riders	Points
1 Martin Davalos	45
2 Jeremy Martin	43
3 Malcolm Stewart	40
4 Justin Hill	38
5 Aaron Plessinger	36



MAKING THE GRADES...

By Steve Matthes

With the midway point of the series, I thought it would be a good time to review the 450SX class and grade some performances of the riders (and a few other things that have caught my eye) with a half a season to go...

A+ for Ryan Dungey. Duh. Dungey's been better than ever and whether it's the new KTM 450SX-F that came out last year, the confidence gathered from working with trainer Aldon Baker or the retirement of Ryan Villopoto, Dungey's reached a new level and is no doubt the undisputed king of American motocross. He'll win the 2016 450SX title and really the only thing he needs to do is take the stars and stripes back to the top at the annual Motocross des Nations to complete the rise. He's got a few demons at that race no doubt about it but you have to think he'll go back this year right?

B+ for Jason Anderson. The Anaheim 1 winner has been exciting this season and not always for good reason. The kid's in his second term in the 450SX class and he's probably been the second most impressive rider this season for his charges to the front after bad starts. He's also found himself in the crosshairs for some aggressive passes (and a few that have crossed the line in this media guy's opinion) but he's pure raw speed baby and can't be held back.

B for Ken Roczen because although he's got two wins he's still not battling with Ryan Dungey for the win week in and week out like a lot of people thought he should be. Roczen's better than everyone else in the class but his starts have been inconsistent and with the rumours of him leaving for Honda next year everywhere, maybe he's not as 'all-in' on winning as he should be.

Roczen's gone on record many times talking about how he wants to have fun and still work hard but in knowing Baker and what he does for his clients, there's not much 'fun' being had over there. Roczen's been very good, but not great so far.

C for Eli Tomac. A "C" is average right? Well that's what Eli Tomac has been early on this year. I think this Daytona win moves him up to more of a contender in the 450SX series but I don't know that for sure so until then, he's been just ok on the new team.

C for Chad Reed because every time I think the #22 is primed to be a winner or podium guy, he can't back it up. Early on there were two straight podiums and pressure on Dungey but not much else since then outside of a lonely third last week in Atlanta. Reed's reunion with Yamaha has been fine if you measure it by buzz, fans waiting in line for autographs and hype but results, if I'm being honest, I thought he'd be better at this point.

C- for Trey Canard as Honda's number 1 rider has had a miserable supercross season. It's like the entire campaign started off so great with a terrific ride from around eighth or so to third in the first main event of the year, then a late-race fall to seventh and another practice crash the week after that. Trey's had a groin injury that has held him back, then a hand injury, he's missed some races, he can't get a start and it's been no good for the former race winner. He'll shake out of this - he's too good not to - but it's been rough.



D for the GP's. Look, I'm not there week in and week out like a lot of people so I'm not exactly an 'insider' but I've been to a bunch of them over the years as well as ten MXDN's in a row. I don't understand how you can have a series go to countries where off-road motorcycles for competition aren't sold in any sort of high numbers, there are no spectators to speak of, the tracks are in a flat field and it's a great expense for everyone to go to. It's clear that there is only one person making money to go to these races and it's not the promoters of the tracks nor the riders nor the teams. Where's the positive to going to countries like Qatar and Thailand?

D for the entire JGR Yamaha team (but it's not their fault really). The star rider Justin Barcia came into the season with a thumb injury then left promptly for some surgery. Weston's Peick 2016 started off with him throwing fists on Vince Friese, a DNF and then a DQ for those actions. After he came back a hard crash has left him with a bad arm injury and he's been struggling. The teams fill-in rider Phil Nicoletti has made every main this year except for the one he was taken out in with a bad crash in the semi. That's the good, the bad is Nicoletti has crashed in every single main but one.

F for Yoshimura Suzuki's James Stewart. Wow. This has gone SO bad hasn't it? Stewart came into the season off a year long suspension not ready to race physically, got knocked out in a crash with Ryan Dungey, came back too soon in Oakland, hurt his knee somewhere along the way, finished 14th and a lap down in Atlanta and then crashed out of Daytona in the heats. It's amazing really what has happened here and it's hard to see how this gets any better for one of

the sports greatest riders. Stewart last finished a supercross on the lead lap almost two years ago when he got second behind Ryan Villopoto near the end of the 2014 season. If anyone can make it back, it's Stew and his talent but this is going to be the toughest challenge of his career.





FEATURE





SANDANISTA! ELI TOMAC GLASSES DAYTONA BEACH SUPERCROSS

By Eric Johnson, Photos by Monster Energy

If you were up in Big Bill France's grandstands looking over the grassy tri-oval section of Daytona International Speedway, or if you were tuned-in to the Fox Sports 1 channel broadcast on Saturday night you know it all came right for Monster Energy Kawasaki rider Eli Tomac. Certainly one of the lead men going into the drama that would be the 2016 Monster Energy Supercross, and FIM World Championship, Tomac, after coming off of a lengthy period of rehabilitation, not to mention the meet and greet phase of signing up with a new team, was thought to be, arguably, the lead challenger for Ryan Dungey's prized supercross No 1 plate. However, it didn't work out that way as the 'can't miss kid' seemingly struggled to get on the championship pace during the first half of the new season.

Nonetheless, Tomac and the entire Kawasaki team kept on pouring the coals to the effort and on the longest and roughest supercross track on the circuit all the hard work and diligence paid out when Tomac took the measure of Dungey in the 20-lap main event at Daytona to win his first supercross on a KX450F. Equal parts ecstatic and relieved after rolling across the finish line, one could say that for both Tomac, as well as the team, the win was a long time coming. Interested to see what Tomac's take on it all would be a few days ex post facto, we tracked down the big kid from Cortez, Colorado.

Alright Eli, congratulations on the excellent performance on Saturday night. Are you back in Colorado now?

No, actually we ran back out to California. I'm going to do some more testing this week and try to get it more dialed in.

I'm going to make a wild assumption here and say you're probably still feeling pretty good about your performance on Saturday night, huh?

(Laughter) Yeah, a lot better, man. Way better.

What clicked? By all accounts you were really on it right from the moment you rolled into the facility on Saturday morning.

Yeah, well I think some of it is just the style of that track. I don't know... Even from practice it was all good. I didn't have to dink with anything and we didn't have to change anything. It was kind of an easy day, you know?

I know you've likely been asked this a hundred times throughout the weekend, but that track really is unique and quite a bit different from a more traditional 50-second lap supercross track, isn't it?

Yeah, it's way different. I mean it's always over a minute long and then you've got supercross jumps mixed with a motocross style layout with the bumps and the ruts and the nastiness that goes along with it. That's the tough part. But honestly we didn't do any special Daytona testing beforehand. We just kind of ran it and then if we did have issues, we were just going to do clickers here and there and we didn't really touch much.

You're renowned for your fitness and endurance. Did all that help you at Daytona?

Yeah, I mean it's a track where you have to manage your energy because it can beat you up because most guys are still on their supercross setup and I was too. It's easy to get tight on that track and yes it is important to be in

shape. For me, I was able to just stay loose and kind of relaxed through that whole main event. Any anytime you can get out front early, too, that's huge for just being relaxed on the bike. Being in shape helps get you through all that.

Ryan Dungey basically shadowed you throughout the entire main event. He got pretty close at times but was never really able to get a hook in you and make a pass. Did you feel like you had him covered? Did you feel comfortable out front?

I was. I was in a good spot mentally during that race to where I wasn't really worried about Ryan behind me. I was able to focus just on the track and that's a place where you have to have that mindset and you can't be worried about the guy behind you. The way the heat race went and also all throughout practice, I just had it in my head that I was going to go out there and win the main. That's what you've got to do.



When you crossed the finish line not only did you look elated, but you also almost looked relieved. Thoughts?

Yeah, it was just a big relief, you know? We've been expecting more, but we had to be realistic. Yeah, it was going to take some time to get up there, but to finally do it was really nice.

Coming off the injuries that you did last season and heading straight into an all-new team for 2016, in retrospect, do you think you may have set your expectations too high for yourself? Do you think it has taken you a little bit longer to get up to speed than you may have envisioned?

I would say it's true. Well, yes and no because when I'm doing my training on the practice track and am in a comfortable situation my body doesn't feel that bad at all. But I've had a couple of race situations this year where yes I have gotten tight, and I don't want to say tired, but where I felt like I wasn't totally up to one hundred percent body strength or form. It's for sure coming around a lot now. For the injury that I had, I think I'm pretty fortunate to be where I'm at for sure.

Heading into Daytona, the last three races, specifically San Diego II, Arlington and Atlanta, didn't go all that well for you. We're you getting frustrated?

Yes I was getting to that point where I was kind of beating myself up. I was like, "Man, I'm not this guy getting the fifth place or the sixth place finishes or who is making the little mistakes and crashing during the mains." I don't know... I somehow just kept in it and pulled it off so I'm hoping this is the change of wind that we needed for sure. To get the win was huge.

How were things back in the pits afterwards? Had the team been getting a bit frustrated with the results leading into Daytona?

We've all been busting our rear ends to make improvements and we all have our own ideas of where we want to go... I don't know what I want to say here... All I know is that no one has given up and that's why we won this past weekend. We're going to keep hammering all the way. The plan now is to keep clicking off a few wins or as many as we can. That's all we really want at this point. We just want to be in

that lead pack every week and obviously trying to fight for the wins. I want to prove to people that I can go out and win the normal super-cross races too and not just the Daytona, more outdoor style track and race. You know even at the signings and stuff at the races, people were like, "Oh man, I can't wait to see you outdoors!" That was actually really digging at me so that was a motivation to go out there and win too. So yeah, I want to prove people wrong that way, too.



Well, you did win three main events and end up on the podium eleven times last season...

Exactly. I had eleven podiums the year before and three wins and I think I'm fourth on the all-time 250 win list, so it's not like I don't know how to ride it. You know this year is something of a rebuilding year. I didn't want to have it that way at all, but that's just kind of how it has fallen into place. I think now we're in a spot where we can really show our true colors

We've spoken about it before, but I know the team wants you to go out there and to try and win, but they also don't want you to take huge, maybe desperate chances in trying to race to the front either, correct? I mean, there has to be a balance there.

There is totally a balance! I mean especially like coming off of an injury like I had or what I came through. You want to get through the season and get that good base again and we're at least doing that now.

Nine races into the season how are you viewing your competition?

It seems like every year there's at least another guy to add to the list of potential winners and the list of the guys who battle for podiums every week. Once again the field is just stacked. Ryan is definitely they guy right now, but yeah, there are those four or five guys that are there every single weekend.

And the start... I know I'm beating a dead horse here, but the start of these main events is just so damn crucial now, isn't it?

Yeah, I don't know what's changing. I don't know if it's the bikes themselves or the tracks, but the start is now almost ninety percent of our race now. If you don't come out in the top three, the front two or three guys run away with it by the second lap. They get that big gap and everyone is so even and fast now it is tough to make up time. It's huge now. It's huge. And it starts with the good qualifying time in practice and then that leads to your heat race. You have to treat your heat race almost like a main event now because you've got to get that good gate pick for the main event. You have to be on it all day to get that start.

Yeah, I've hear the word "pole", like NASCAR pole or Formula 1 pole, being used quite a bit as of late. The pole really is important now, isn't it?

Yeah, it's huge because it all leads to that good gate pick for the heat race and if you can go out there and holeshot your heat race, you're probably going to win it. And that leads to where there are normally only two or three really good gates for the main event and usually the start will come from one of those gates so you've got to be there.

So now it's off to Toronto?

Yeah, I feel body-wise that I'm ready to go. Shoot, I mean it's nice to be coming off a win and taking that to this next race. We'll see if we can do it again.

ET WITH EJ



SCOTT

Scott's 550 has been featured in OTOR before but by stressing high performance and analysing the weak points of their rivals on the market Scott have come up with some handy features of their relatively new offering. The boot stress protection but also 'ease'. There are three buckles, a multi-axial pivot, a replaceable sole, low tow profile and a 'tulip' style opening system which means that the footwear could not be easier to put on and remove. Manufactured in Italy the 550 is a bold step forward for Scott who could not look as favourably on past editions of their boots as they can now. We'd like to see more colourways and more livery options but the 550 cannot be ignored for off-road riders on the hunt for practical and reliable foot protection.







FEATURE

THE FINAL SAY-SO: **MotoGP** IN QATAR

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR LOSAIL TO CLEAR UP THE PITLANE RESIDUE OF MXGP FOR THE FINAL THREE-DAY TEST FOR MOTOGP BEFORE THE SAME VENUE LAUNCHES THE FIRST OF EIGHTEEN ROUNDS ON SUNDAY 20TH OF THIS MONTH. WE HUNG AROUND TO GATHER SOME REACTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES AFTER THE INITIAL THROES AROUND THE FLOODLIT FACILITY...

By Adam Wheeler

Photos by ~~Monster Energy~~/Milagro, www.suzuki-racing.com, Repsol Honda, Ducati Corse Press
Estrella Galicia 0,0 Marc VDS, Pramac Racing,

MotoGP IN QATAR



Tyres, wires and forecasting: these three issues hung around the MotoGP paddock like the increased humidity that eventually caused the condensation to run off the pitlane box roofs akin to rain drops in the desert. The same level of damp had not affected MXGP four days earlier and was something else for the technicians and MotoGP riders (Moto3 and Moto2 were busy at Jerez during the same period) to think about. After a sweaty opener to the pre-season at Sepang and a chilly dip into the curves of Phillip Island in Australia it was time for the night, dew, track dust and lighting of Qatar. The presence of numerous Michelin staff, lengthy interviews with a Magneti Marelli specialist at one end of the Media Centre and some surprising times and speed that already spurned talk of who might cause an upset in just two weeks were clues to themes that were dominating thoughts and work at Losail...much as they had done in Malaysia and Victoria. And there was also the first roll out of the exceptionally loud and very 'Aprilia-looking' RS-GP for Alvaro Bautista and Stefan Bradl and all the teething processes that a new motorcycle requires.

From the perspective of a MotoGP fan it was curious to hear the riders themselves addressing the 'unknown territory' that the series now faced. "I think you will see some people win a race or be on the podium who have never been anywhere near," offered the ever-articulate Cal Crutchlow. "You've got the chance of some guys who were forty seconds away on a different manufacturer last year jumping on another manufacturer and being one or two seconds from a win...just because that manufacturer is in good shape at the moment or they are gaining six tenths on the straight. There are loads of combinations. It is good for the fans I suppose but it is not good for the riders who are more in the s**t."

"If the race was tomorrow I think it would be completely different to last year or the last four or five years," said world champion Jorge Lorenzo, and the only rider to break the 1min 55 bracket (under the circuit record set by Casey Stoner in 2008 but almost a second slower than his own fastest lap from the same year). "We will have a lot of surprises and also the riders should be careful with everything because of all the changes."

Potential and performance swirled around the three nights where Pramac Ducati's Scott Redding continued to shine (an OTOR special interview coming in the next issue) and Suzuki's Maverick Viñales and the Movistar Yamahas were consistently in the ball-park. Valentino Rossi crashed twice with Marc Marquez also hitting the ground and Dani Pedrosa plummeting to a point where he could only deliver monosyllabic answers to media enquiries as to his progress with the works Honda.

Naturally Michelin was probably the main talking point and more than one rider cited the longevity of the tyres (the rear mainly) as a plus point, even if the French black stuff did take a while to get going. Losail was pretty dusty on the first day – a factor that had Pol Espargaro a little concerned on the Monster Energy Tech3 Yamaha. "The first day is never easy because the track is so dirty," the Catalan said. "The first runs were not too bad but then we put a hard compound on like we were running it for the race and there was zero grip. This is not normal for Michelin so I hope it is the track."

"It was like motocross out there," said Estrella Galicia 0,0 Marc VDS' Jack Miller, getting topical. "So we didn't waste too many tyres and the track will get better."



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FEATURE



"The Michelin tyres don't really start working until about four or five laps in but then they just don't go off. It will make for interesting racing," continued the Australian who was hobbling around Losail just five weeks after surgery on his right leg. "It was harder here than Phillip Island with the amount of f**king right turns because my leg was good until we started riding and then it just expanded. I've been working on the Achilles to try and get some movement going in my foot so its not just dragging on the floor. It has been five weeks now so another two and a half will not hurt. If we had to sit on the grid tomorrow I can still do it."

"I feel good with Michelin," mused Lorenzo. "The Michelins and the electronics require a big change in terms of riding style. The tyres need a little bit of time to warm up so you have to be careful, still you have to understand the limits of this configuration. It seems that [with] the official Yamaha we are ahead of the rest for some laps at the moment and this is positive."

"The feeling is still not clear because I did my fastest lap with twenty laps on the tyre," said Ducati's Andrea Dovizioso. "It means that we don't have everything under control. It is positive because we have a margin but it is not easy to manage. You almost have to start from zero because the [new] bike feels really different from the past. It is not easy to understand everybody's pace."

Bradley Smith, who managed only a handful of laps on the second day, was puzzled by the tyre allocation from Michelin that left him limited for choice and also for resources. "I'm a bit bemused that we have a lot of tyres in our allocation that we won't have for the race. I have asked and there doesn't seem to be any answers; it's like a jumble sale."

When he could offer some assessment the Brit said: "I think we still need to be open-minded because we don't know what tyres and compounds will work each weekend. You might

need to chose something extreme because it is Michelin's first season and they might turn up with something that is too soft or too hard and we are going to have to ride with those, there is no way around it. That's why we have two bikes! The nice thing is that I have a clear base to start the season and that was one of the fundamental things I was searching for so desperately last season and it paid dividends in the results that I had...in that I could just turn up with something that I know. It is nice to be in that situation."

Not everyone was as content as the Yamaha man with their base set-up. The Honda elite in particular voiced their concerns. Marquez would improve by Friday and the final sessions both in terms of his speed and his feeling but on Wednesday he was complaining of chronic understeer that was penalising his corner exit.

"If we want a good exit then we have to lose a lot of time in the middle of the corner," the 23 year old winner of the '14 GP in Losail explained. "It is difficult to know how to compensate. It is tricky to turn the bike in the middle of the corner and with too much inclination we know we don't have grip. So we are trying to improve the turning and the exit and Dani and I were using different chassis but had the same problem."

"The braking point is OK but at the moment I cannot go where I want to," he continued. "We have to improve the balance of the bike and try to give me again the confidence. In Phillip Island [my] confidence was there but here I lost quite a lot. With the electronics we have improved but with the geometry we are struggling. In Malaysia it was the electronics but at Sepang we can use our potential, which is the braking point: you can brake late. Here you cannot because all the corners are quite big and you have to float on the bike and the track." By the end of the test '93' was happier but – as for many riders – his prospects for the Grand Prix remain clouded.

Crutchlow, who went down on Wednesday evening, was also perplexed and even went as far to suggest that MotoGP could initially fall into brand sub-divisions as the teams strive to match each other on the new parameters. "We just have too much heat in the front tyre," he said. "The front does not turn and they are way too soft for our bike. We are in a bit of a rock and a hard place at the moment. We crashed because we come into every corner and we are bouncing the front tyre. We need to fix this because it was only four laps into a run."

"Do you think Hector Barbera is faster than Marc Marquez? I don't," he carried on. "The result is relative to what we have. Even at the first race maybe Marc or Dani can pull a miracle and ride around things. We know Jack and Tito are on the same as us and we are ahead of them but it could be a [whole] year of this; you might not be looking at a result but instead a result of the guy riding for the same manufacturer."



Despite his concerns Crutchlow was complimentary on the work Honda had managed with the RCV motor and the combination with the electronics...and insisted he was not as far away as the times might suggest. "Genuinely I am pleased enough with the 2016 engine. We need to work in some areas for sure but it is better with the electronics, which was our main problem before. I've been quite impressed. I am actually quite happy because the speed with the hard rear is good so if we can sort the front then we have potential...and I mean a lot of potential."



Lorenzo also gave feedback to the press on the burring and beeping under the M1 fairing. "The electronics is less sophisticated so you have to pay attention to the throttle. It is more demanding. Physically and mentally you always have to be careful. I think for the smooth rider it is going to be better. Let's see. Every track could have different performance."

Crutchlow was one of many finding extra traction with the Michelin rear compared to the Bridgestone. Espargaro even went as far as to suggest that the Yamaha's seamless gearbox did not carry much of an advantage with the new rubber. "With the Bridgestone the rear end of the bike would move a lot so we needed smooth changes up and down. As the Michelin has more grip then you have more stability and you have less need for the seamless [gearbox] going down...but still it's a good improvement. I think it gave more advantage with the Bridgestone because everybody was pretty close. This year the difference is increasing."

In other corners of the paddock there was quiet optimism. "It has been my best pre-season so far since coming into MotoGP," said Redding. "I've had a lot of fun and I've enjoyed riding the bike and being with the team. We have been where we want to be; nothing too special and not too far at the back and we've done all of it alone. Today [Wednesday] I had one hook-up, with Maverick, and the tyre had done 25 laps and I did my fastest [lap]. So I know I can still pick up half a second. I'm not the kind of guy to follow and I make my own things...and that's why this pre-season has felt good because I have been able to do it myself and progress and not be stuck in a hole like previously. I feel a lot more motivated and competitive."

"Step by step I was feeling good and with the old chassis I felt so fast," said Viñales, who shone again on the GSX-RR. "I could not believe it when I saw '55', I hadn't made many laps and already I was quite fast. With the new chassis it was a little harder. With the '15 chassis I can move the bike where I want. If I want to be 'out' one metre then I can and the bike feels lighter. With the new one I feel more grip but it is still heavy."



"I'm actually really confident!" beamed Smith. "I feel from a traction control and tyre point of view we are in a good place. I pretty much did my best lap on full race distance tyres. Really good for where we are at the moment. I am pleasantly surprised."



"I was quite satisfied on the second bike because it looks like we are competitive and we can be strong and fast and this is the most important thing," said 2015 race winner Rossi. "This is already the third track where the Yamaha is competitive. I started with a good base set-up and I feel in a good way. We are already a little bit faster with the '55s than the Bridgestone last year."

"The races are different to the test so it is difficult for me to say [how the race might fare]," he added. "It looks like we are more competitive at this test than we were last year but we have to wait for the race weekend. From the data and the feeling it is not so bad."

For those assuming the desert air and lights make for a relatively easy spin around Losail for the first Grand Prix the conditions of the test shed some light on how tricky it is to find the optimum setting for the race set to run at 21.00 local time. "At nine o'clock everyone more or less stops riding because the temperatures goes down so quickly and the humidity goes up," comments Lorenzo. "You have to be careful in these conditions so three hours is not much time to try many things."

It is a key time for riders to slot in the preferred tyres and configuration and try a race simulation. In the final laps a bit of one-upmanship came into play with Lorenzo, Redding, Viñales, Marquez and Rossi filling the top five. "You hold your breath a lot...or tense your arse cheers together. When it gets to 9.30 and there is dew on the ground outside the garage then it doesn't fill you with confidence either," said Crutchlow.

Ah, confidence. This could be the crucial factor that determines a first podium order of the year in a little over a week. For the larger picture of the sport (and mindful of the FIM's new penalty ruling) it will be the first time rivalries renew since the dramatic end to 2015. Will the Qatari Grand Prix winner twelve months ago be ready to go again and begin another title charge? "It was a difficult period after Valencia but it is already a long time ago," said 46. "It feels like five or six years ago! [I have] good motivation and great excitement because you can start from zero."



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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

WHAT DO MOTOGP RACERS THINK OF SUPERCROSS? FOR MANY A TRIP TO THE STADIUMS OF THE USA IS EITHER A REGULAR DATE IN THE DIARY OR SOMETHING ON THE BUCKET-LIST THAT HAS TO BE SQUEEZED IN THE SCHEDULE SOMEHOW. STEVE ENGLISH ASKED A SMATTERING OF THE SPORT'S TOP NAMES WHY THE SECOND-BIGGEST MOTORCYCLE RACING SERIES IS SUCH A BIG DRAW

By Stephen English

Photos by Monster Energy/Milagro, www.suzuki-racing.com, Repsol Honda, Tech3.fr
Estrella Galicia 0,0 Marc VDS, Simon Cudby, Ray Archer, JP Acevedo

Having a one track mind is something that most racers are accused of from time to time. When there's any gathering of riders conversation quickly turn back to racing so it's no surprise that for most the ideal holiday includes a trip to Supercross. In the MotoGP off-season there is almost as much world class riding talent in the stands as there is at the gates!

The atmosphere of a night at the races is something that draws casual fans to Supercross but it's also something that the likes of Andrea Dovizioso, Casey Stoner and Jack Miller love about the AMA mainly-USA set championship. With some of the best motocross riders on the planet to watch and an intense and lively race schedule that sets the scene for an action packed evening it's no surprise that the championship continues to grow in popularity.

So what can MotoGP learn from Supercross? Who impresses the top riders in the world with their skills on the dirt? Here's what some of the fastest motorcycle athletes in the world have to say on these matters...

Casey Stoner "It's a different world over there! It's in a stadium, which makes for such a confined space and you almost don't know where to look because there's that much going on. You're watching the big screen and you're trying to watch your favorite rider and then you hear the crowd go, "Ah!" There's a big gasp. You look back up at the big screen and you see something that's happened over that part of the track. During the whole night you get that much action between the heat races and it really is a great spectacle and something that I've wanted to do for a lot of years. So being able to go to four races in 2014 was something I'd wanted to do since I was a very, very young boy. That was awesome."

"It's one of those events that you can take the wife and kids to and everyone's able to have a

good time. When you look at a MotoGP race or World Superbike or anything like that, it's a lot harder to get people in the door just because it's spread over a long time. Is there anything that we can do to try and make things a bit more family friendly? Supercross is good because people walk around the pits and things like that, and that's all good but it just couldn't happen here. You'd have too many people coming in and you'd never be able to move. You can barely move as it is."

"I think because you sit down in one spot, you can see everything; it's entertainment right there on your front doorstep. They do it on [American] football fields and it's the same kind of thing as watching football. You get to watch the whole thing unfold right in front of you rather than bikes flying by and you just can't really improve that. The closest you get to that in MotoGP is Valencia. It's as much as an amphitheatre as you can get. That's a fantastic spectacle but then you don't necessarily get close to the track like you can in other circuits."

Bradley Smith "Supercross is great because there's great fan interaction. They can get up close, they can get autographs signed and so on and so forth. The fact that you turn up at 7pm and it's finished by 10:30 makes a massive difference. We're trying to do more for interaction and IRTA and the FIM have now put it in the regulations that all riders and everybody have to be available for the autograph signings and stuff like that. So it's something that we all have to take on board as riders. We have to go over into the fans areas and to the pit lane a lot more. Something that I've always tried to do is be available for the fans on the pit lane and doing the exterior things where you go out and do the Monster rig or you go and do the promotional signings from the actual promoter of the weekend. It's something that we need to take a bit more seriously and make sure that we're available for those types of things."

MotoGP ON SUPERCROSS



"The actual way that the shows run, I don't think there's much that we can do here. The fact that you can put it in a stadium, put 70,000 people there and keep everything so contained is obviously a really nice situation to be in. When you're trying to put everyone around a 5km track and make everyone feel welcome, it's a bit more difficult. You turn up at Valencia and there's a great atmosphere. Why? Because it's a 4 km circuit within a 'stadium'. Unless we're going to build every track like that it's more difficult to do. But certainly the fan interaction thing is something we have to take more seriously."

"At the end of the day everyone wants to feel welcome. Within this paddock certainly they tee it up for the top riders to feel welcome. The satellite riders, we don't because you don't have quite the TV time. I don't remember which Grand Prix it was but there was a lot of interaction between the TV and the fans with obviously the Jorge and Valentino battle. I think it was Malaysia. So you see what's being done for all of them, and then they don't turn up at autograph signings or they leave after ten minutes, and you sit there for half an hour and get nothing for it. Now at some point you're going to start looking at those types of situations and go, "well, I'm not interested," or, "I'm going to start being like them." They're being paid however much more to do this and getting more TV time and they're putting less effort in than we are. So it's a difficult one because you shouldn't have that attitude. You should actually do it for the fans rather than let someone else set that precedent."

"It's difficult to organise the weekend though because, let's be honest, between the FP1 and FP2 or FP3 and qualifying you're not really in the state of mind to go and sign things for half an hour. Someone runs late or something moves on, by the time you arrive then you're there for ten minutes. It's up to the promoter to come up with something interesting, something that the fans want and something that the

riders are actually interested in. If you look at any Monster rig autograph signing, it's a great atmosphere. And actually everybody enjoys being there because there's music playing and the fans are interested and so on and so forth. It's something that we have to have a look at."

"I love Supercross and have so much respect for the riders but it's just so depressing when I ride with them! I think that MotoGP has helped me ride better at motocross but when you go and you see how fast that they are going it's phenomenal. They go around a corner with their feet stood up on the pegs leaning in, and I'm thinking the only way for me to go around that quick is to put my knee on the floor! The fitness level they have is phenomenal because to keep on scrubbing and laying it over and scrub again and then flat out through the whoops and lay it in again... It's so physically demanding."



Smith MX-ing in '12

"It's exciting...except for Dungey! I said it to someone the other day: "Dungey is like Team Sky in cycling from about three years ago". He's riding at such a high level that anyone that wants to go by either crashes or they blow up. He's just able to ride at such a level that someone can beat him but they need to be moving to be able to do it."

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MotoGP ON SUPERCROSS

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Cal Cruthclow "Supercross is popular because of the entertainment that's provided at the circuit, not necessarily because they want to watch a motorbike go around. We also have a lot of people come here that are not so interested in motorbikes but when they come they can't wait to come back again, or it's been the highlight of their year or stuff like that. But I think here is quite polished. It's very media-oriented, saying the right things. Supercross sure is very similar, but I think it's a lot more relaxed. I'd go over and race that because it's sort of my style where you can do what you want but I can't start a motocross bike, let alone ride one!"

"I enjoy going to the show and I go with Lucy every year. We couldn't go this year but normally we make the first two or three because we're over there for that amount of time. The strange thing is it's so relaxed in Supercross that you can have four races off and still be paid and nobody says anything! We can also have four races off here and still be paid, but all you press and everything push us; you need to come back. I love to go and watch and I wish I could go and see some more."

"I love to watch those guys ride because I can't really ride a motocross bike. I can see exactly what they do and how they do it, I just can't do it. It's as simple as that. And actually I don't really want to do it because when I'm done riding the motorbike here I'm not interested in them. So I like to go and watch someone else ride, but it scares me to watch them because they're so fast!"

Jack Miller "I think Supercross is the greatest spectacle of motorcycle racing! To put everything in one little stadium and then pack it full of people is unreal. The way they do it in America is correct. Let the fans in, let them see, you get to mix and mingle. You walk around the paddock and the riders walk through. It's unreal. I think if you want to witness motorsport racing at its best I think supercross is definitely where it's at."



"The riders are just amazing the way that they do it all. Just small things. They look so fluid, making it look easy and you're out there on the flat with your feet hanging off the back trying to do the same thing. It's pretty amazing. I don't think that there's much difference in terms of talent between them and us it's just some people are good at this, some people are good at that. We're good at short circuits and they're good on the dirt."

“Physically the challenge is different and Supercross is ‘whole body’ and it’s a severe sort of a sport in terms of heart rate. But in terms of fitness I think we work equally as hard for sure. It’s hard work also riding these things at 300km an hour and trying to stop it to 60. A MotoGP bike is an animal but of course we got to try to keep our heart rates as average as possible.”

Scott Redding “I love watching Supercross because I do a lot of motocross and all those guys impress me when I watch them. Dungey is very smooth, consistent and he doesn’t take too much risk to do it. I like Chad Reed because he’s classy. He’s been around and he’s still fighting at the front. I respect them all so much for what they do. I would like to do what they do and I can’t do it on that level.”

“I’ve never ridden with any of the Supercross guys. I’ve had some experience riding with a few quick guys from Europe. You think you’re going fast and the f***er comes around the outside and stood up on the pegs. It’s quite impressive to see the bike control they’ve got at that level!”

Andrea Dovizioso “It’s a completely different world. They ride the bike minimum four times every week, plus the race. And this is something very important. At home I’ve now started to ride a [road] bike but normally nobody does this during a season. I think it’s quite important also to try to improve the riding style. Also if you are fast you can always improve in a few areas. I really like how they prepare the week. They have to be really precise about training, the heat, the food. They train away from the bike...but we can’t do that in the same way.”



Marc Marquez “Motocross is my biggest passion and I started when I was a kid. Then for different situations I moved to road racing, but my biggest passion is motocross. I watch all the Supercross races. I like watching because every time they go out the track it changes and the circuit will look different and the feeling will change because it’s more dry, more wet or the sun has changed. It’s quite good I think for the feeling on the bike but also for physical conditioning.”



MAVERICK: ON THE DIRT...

MOTOGP'S BRIGHTEST STAR TALKS OFF-ROAD AND KEEPING PACE WITH A FOUR TIMES MX WORLD CHAMPION AS A GIRLFRIEND...

I started riding motocross when I was five and then up to the age of nine I was riding but also on the asphalt. Motocross is something I've always liked and when I can I get out to ride, especially during the week. For MotoGP now it is a good form of training for what it means physically as well as mentally and it helps me because it's hard! Especially going with Kiara because to try and keep ahead of her is something that helps! I started riding at a track called Los Arcos close to my town in Figueres is was hard pack and used to be longer and more 'professional'.

I like motocross because for me it is more 'savage', more wild. Honestly I enjoy it more: the jumping, the sliding. Road racing is more difficult to arrive to the top because you need a lot of sponsors and people behind you. You need everything to go right and well to get there.

I used to go riding with my cousin, Isaac, and we used to travel to the Catalan races. There was always competition between us! Motocross is more 'family' and more social. It is so different to road racing. You have more contact with the people. MotoGP is about you, your team and that's it. You arrive, race the weekend and go home. Motocross is more about hanging out, talking with other riders, watching other riders. It's apart.

There is such exposure for MotoGP now that the sport has become so professional. There are a lot of people in the paddock and it can be difficult to be there...but there are some really fun and interesting races. I remember in Moto2 being part of some battles that were great, and I think for the spectators also.

There has been a bit of a dry spell for motocross in Spain. I remember going to some tracks and there wasn't anybody around. Now I think people are slowly coming back to it and you see

more people at the circuit. I remember when I was in Moto2 I went to the track behind Montmelo [Barcelona MotoGP circuit] and honestly I could not find a space! I think it has been growing again slowly.

I don't ride motocross at 100% or where I might put myself at risk. I always have that small margin from the limit. [thinks] There are days when I do push and go full-gas but I also know where my job is and I have to give in. It would be stupid to crash big doing motocross. In motocross I always ride quite relaxed, take a higher gear! I'm not sure of my style; you'll have to ask Kiara.

I ride a 250. I think it is more fun. I know I would also enjoy a 450 but I can control the 250 well and have fun with the smaller bike.

I think riding with Kiara is good for her as well! Whatever track we ride at I'll make a time and try to lower it by a second and then she'll aim to do the same. It really doesn't seem like she's a girl on the track. I have 100% respect because I know what it takes to win a world championship and in 2013 I pushed a lot. Big respect [to her] for four titles.

It was very weird being a spectator in Qatar. When I'm at a Grand Prix I'm quite relaxed because I know what I need to do but here I was nervous! I have a very different role here.

This year in MotoGP I have a good feeling but I'm also paying a lot of attention to what I do because conditions can change at the circuit. At Phillip Island I have always felt good, right from the first time I went there on a 125. I've always been quick there, so I cannot really start relaxing. I have to look ahead and I know to be with the leaders I have to work a lot and trust that by the midpoint of the season we'll have a competitive package.



MOTOGP ON SUPERCROSS



PRODUCTS



FOX

Fox have improved the resistance of their boots and undoubtedly their styling in the past five years and now the Instinct cannot be ignored for its profile, form and functionality. This is a damn fine boot and this yellow and blue LE model is the premium model that Fox boast has 'instant step-in comfort and support with zero break-in required'. The hinge system is patent pending with a lock-out that stops motion before hyper extension. The sole is made from a Duratec rubber compound and the four buckles easily snap into place. Expect a price of around 380 pounds in the UK



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KTM



KTM FACTORY RACING





SUSTAINING THE DREAM:

THE RELEVANCE OF BIKE LAUNCHES

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by KTM



There can be fewer more enviable jobs in the whole of motorcycling than the test journalist. Lucky souls like our own Roland Brown might live in a cycle of endless travel and looming deadlines but there can be no doubt that doing the rounds of international bike launches and being the first to try sumptuous new machinery is a pretty good way to try and earn a keep. We spoke with three key people at KTM – one of the brands most active with the presentation of new models in the past five years – to question whether the costly exercise of flying media ‘here and there’ and providing the ultimate experience in terms of blending work and pleasure – was still an essential activity in a day and age where ‘belt-tightening’ has become more than a watchword but a whole means of existence for many manufacturers.

We turn our room key over. The personalised 690 Duke launch card is another nice touch. From the moment of our arrival at the Sheraton hotel in Gran Canaria – situated in the depths of a tranquil golf resort and exuding class – we are hit by the KTM immersion experience. After a friendly welcome by the events team, we glide by the new 690 in the reception area and the accompanying orange decoration. We are given our itinerary and that room key and once in our quarters find a welcome message and a gift.

There is time for a coffee and to get riding kit organised before the evening press conference on the new bikes followed by a buffet dinner. The next day is spent in the saddle (and staff photographers and videographers get material in the can) with lunch by the beach and then back to the hotel in time to write up some notes, take some photos and then head for an evening meal with the group of press colleagues.



There are customised menus and KTM themed table decorations and some excellent food. Not a bad life.

KTM's events team and PR department go above and beyond to make sure that each major model launch has a worthy platform for international media (and they come from every continent) to write, talk and want to communicate on Mattighofen's latest offering. In November it was the 690 and last week a fleet of 1290 Super Duke GTs could be found haunting the roads around Majorca.



The Austrian brand has been busy with activities like these since exploding with their street catalogue, reaching more than one billion turnover and becoming Europe's top manufacturer. We wondered just how necessary it was to finesse the world's press and treat them so damn well. And whether it was an investment that could be sustained considering the sizeable expense of – in the 690's case - shipping over forty bikes and putting up more than twenty-five staff (events crew, PR staff, R&D personnel for presentations and mechanics for bike maintenance) and then all the press for ten days or more.

"We are always trying to adapt to the demands of the media and the cultural changes, so factors like the numbers of publications and how the market is altering," opines KTM Press and PR Manager Thomas Kuttruf a man with some sixteen years experience of launches both in orange and as a reporter. "What will not change is that for the most important motorcycles you need to give people who have the proper channels the means to talk about a proper riding experience. This will stay in place and from a KTM point of view it is the easiest way to bring over strong messages. I can honestly say that the real strength in KTM is the motorcycles themselves, so when we hand over a key - whether it is a circuit or an open road - it seems almost impossible that the people won't like it! I would say these kinds of riding tests are essential."



"It is definitely not a jolly and the media here have their own agendas and deadlines and maybe some different requests," asserts Street PR Manager Luke Brackenbury. "We know they are focussed and want to help them do their job as well as possible. OK, we look after them and wine-and-dine them but when people have travelled from Australia and have been thirty-six hours on-route then the goal is just to relax people and get them ready for the bike."

MAKING THEM HAPPEN...

KTM hosted five bike launches in 2015 alone. Combine this figure with increased proactivity by other brands (from Aprilia to Yamaha) and it means that quite a few new motorcycles are circulating roads and tracks around the world before they screech into dealerships and showrooms for public consumption. The type of launch depends on the type of product and can involve a trip across the continents, track sessions, briefings and riding times with racing and sport stars or even personalities in the case of KTM's Freeride E off-road and bicycle freestyle star Danny Macaskill. At the head of the events team is Eva Priewasser; a lady overseeing the company's output in the hands of the press for almost two decades. KTM do everything in house and usually do not rely on an event or creative agency.

"We basically focussed on off-road when I started and we didn't have an expert on launches in the company," she recalls. "So I built it up and the budget was completely different and we had to create and stock our material and resources. We didn't have a truck or anything. My first was Erzberg in '98 and we went there with a rally truck and some easy-ups! When we started street launches our 'world' changed completely because the media was different to off-road. So we built it up and now we are at the stage where we cannot go back. We have a certain level and the media really appreciates that. I talk a lot with them and we have a high standard right now – which is really good – and we want to be a number one brand so we keep it."

That level means an attention to detail and an informal vibe...even if it doesn't always appear that way behind the scenes. "I think we are quite different in how we do it and it's very relaxed," says Brackenbury. "Everyone loves the product and cannot wait to show it off and that goes from the mechanics, to the event staff to the PR; everyone wants to hear what others

think of it. Everyone involved with the project rides at some point in the launch and we'll be having a beer with the media at the end of the day. It is a cool thing to do."

"From the staffing perspective we brought forty-five bikes here in two lorries," he goes on, referring specifically to the 690 event. "Those bikes need to be built-up, prepped and checked and maintained. Then all the branding, route checks and double-checking the photo points. When that's locked down then we do the pre-launch photographs so we have good stock material if people need it. Then we run through the presentation....everybody does more than their job and it is a real team effort. It is definitely not a holiday and the days are long. What is cool is that there is no hierarchy and we all pull together. It is a bit like a stage show, there is a lot going on behind the curtain to make it happen and when it draws back there is a bike and a couple of people in the spotlight but a lot has gone into making that happen."

"It is a crazy effort but more on the event side to create everything properly," affirms Kuttruf. "It involves many details and logistics. You can just imagine bringing forty-five bikes to the Canarian islands...also from a legal point of view it is quite complicated to get all of this done. As soon as the framework is built then the stage is there and you just have to fill the bikes with fuel."

The orange theming is another element designed to leave a particular taste and we've experienced its effectiveness first-hand in terms of digesting a perception of the brand. "Definitely [the extra details] was a way to standout," says Priewasser. "With every launch I was thinking 'what more can I do?' It was a step-by-step process since '98 to get to the point where the KTM launches look like they do today."

KTM & BIKE LAUNCHES



"This 690 launch is on a usual level for size and scope," she continues. "It is pretty big and then when we do academies for dealers it is similar. Just for press? This is standard I would say. I looked at the recent Africa Twin launch and the photos that were coming out and I had the feeling that there was something missing in terms of what the manufacturer provides. You also get feedback from media and it seems we offer something else when it comes to organisation and riding sessions. We are pretty flexible and easy; it is the KTM family and not a stiff 'white gloves' company. It makes us strong because all the mechanics and PR people all work together to make it happen. Even the R&D people were working with me in the conference room to get everything set out for the next day."

An undeniable part of any riding presentation is the location. A place often warm and with a good chance of sunshine. It is another aspect of the fantastical set-up that launches inhabit. "A road launch happening in the winter means we are limited in Europe," says Brackenbury. "Nobody wants to see dull pictures so it usually means some stunning locations and weather and fantastic roads. Jumping on a plane might be a ball-ache but people know they are coming to a nice hotel and we'll put on a great show with a nice route and good photos."

"Production is also a factor and when the models are available," Priewasser adds, expanding on a practical point. "It can be difficult to do overseas stuff if you don't have the bikes in time for shipping."

Events can last over a week and involve many months of pre-planning. "Normally it is ten days for three groups," Eva explains. "The legal situation has changed recently in Austria that limits our hours and days for working so I have to change staff through the event. For a regular Street launch we will have around twenty-five staff coming and going and in the future it will be more as we'll have to swap. Maybe it will be forty."





COUNTING THE COST...

Bikes, rooms, staff, travel, dining, occasional crash repair; taking KTM on the road and putting new and exotic machinery in the hands of the press is not a cheap exercise. It is tough to pin an exact figure on the outlay but it doesn't take a genius mathematician to work out that KTM will have to shift a few units of their 1290 Super Duke GT to cover the outlay on the Mallorca exposition.

The return comes in media value (the price of a page or space in a prominent motorcycling magazine or website) and the direct route for conveying the brand's objective with a specific product to the end consumer. That information is relayed to the media by the presentation segment of the launch, the press kit, the talk with KTM personnel on site and then finally with the bike and ride itself. An evening meal and drink is like a form of 'debrief'. It has proven to be an effective and necessary channel for putting the bike into the consciousness

of riders and followers in the industry. It means those on the 'circuit' of launch invitations can bask in an envied lifestyle and companies like KTM are not about to start crimping on budgets any time soon when they have a machine like the GT to announce to all and sundry.

"It is like a dream job; from the journalists side and the manufacturer also to be involved in introductions like this and to live with a product," Kuttruf says. "It is a luxury no doubt but there is also a business case behind it with a lot of work. We have to evaluate media value and we are not here like a tourist agency to just find guests or people. In advance we have to decide through intense discussions with our national partners the target groups and media audiences. We select them with care, I would say, to ensure we get the best possible outcome. It is not like a lottery. The outcome with media coverage clearly out performs the investment."

KTM & BIKE LAUNCHES

"We control the costs carefully and have to take care of basics such as if the product is working well and the media are comfortable without needing a seven star hotel," he adds. "The bike makes the difference for KTM. If you have to offer something weak to the press then you probably need more luxury to make up for it! The main star of the experience should not be the hotel, the bar, the dinner or the spa but the product."

"When we launch a bike then normally it [the budget] is pretty much the same," offers Priewasser. "Either we do a launch and we do it properly or we don't. For budgeting I will start a year in advance with finding locations and organisation. It means that around August time I will know exactly what it happening for the next year."

"It definitely pays back," believes Brackenbury. "If you are confident in the product and people are hopefully excited about the bike since the presentation at EICMA or one of the other shows then it builds up. I don't think you have to do a launch, there are different ways for different products and we have done other things on a lower scale and had great results. This 690 and the 690 R are out in the showrooms early and we cannot do this in Europe right now so being here is about giving it the best kind of kickstart into the market. I think an event like this reflects how important the product is."

What about during the years of the crisis? At the turn of the century it was not uncommon for brands to take the media to places like Australia, South Africa and the U.S and 'push out the boat' in the support of a new motorcycle. While certain brands felt the downturn Priewasser shakes her head in terms of what it

meant for her job. KTM are now renowned for their robust attitude and approach to the lean years that actually saw the orange squeezing out more juice and beginning anew. "With the crisis the launches did not change too much because it was a 'must' for the brand. There was not really a big step back."

"Before the crisis I think launches were completely wild," she says. "I don't know how many times I went to the hospital with the media. It was crazy. I was wondering if I could deal with it. Around the crisis there was a change of mentality and somehow there was a fear not to be able to get back to work on a Monday. It used to be like a racetrack out there on the road and now there is much more 'brain'! And they are taking it more seriously."



CHANGING MEDIA...

The expenses at the bottom of the excel sheet might not have fluctuated too much but the bikes themselves has certainly evolved and the press have moved with the times also. Print media is offset by coverage a prominent website and Blog can provide and especially one with an active social media profile. KTM have had to re-evaluate how they cater for multimedia and also the various strands of exposure one person or title can offer.

“One major practical change to the launches and execution is the production, observation and delivery of materials for photos and videos,” says Kuttruf. “Ten years ago video was maybe requested by 3-4% of journos on the launch and now it is standard with a minimum of 30% using footage. It means a different approach and is more complicated in terms of extra staff and post production. There is way-more social media, blogs and web stuff in the game instead of the usual classic monthly print publications. It has an effect on the evaluation of the launch.”

“When I first started digital photography had just started to become the norm so maybe you had your CD when you left!” reflects Brackenbury. “There wasn’t any ftps or wettransfer programmes. I remember being on a launch with an Italian company and on the way to the airport we had another van behind us with the photographer frantically burning CDs to get the material to the journalists before they checked in.”



Deadlines can now be measured in minutes instead of days or week and this means bike launches have to carry a level of presentation and in-depth level of information to cope with all the camera phones, podcasts and Facebook posts. The journalist might be a lot busier compared to fifteen years ago while juggling three devices but it means that a company like KTM can expect even more exposure from their efforts and it justifies further the expenditure.



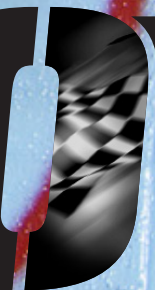
Rather than considering ways to scale back it seems that KTM, in particular, are looking at how they can evolve their launches to make them even more versatile for the coverage that is generated. "We try to do the products launches with the best and maximum effort and sometimes we are learning things that we did not expect – that is quite normal – but the biggest challenge is to find the right tools for the right products," divulges Kuttruf. "A good example is what we learnt with the electric bikes and e-mobility products. They are so interesting, not only for specialised titles but they get access to other publications and other specific interest press – web, social media or print – so it was a big challenge to identify editors to come over from say a daily publication to test ride an electric motorcycle. These are targets where we have to invest even more energy. We don't want to sell motorcycles just to the existing community but also tell the outside world how logical and how much sense it might be to ride a KTM. A motocross presentation is about the core customer; it might be a really bad idea to invite a journalist from a daily newspaper to ride a 450SX-F at Glen Helen. An electric supermoto for him or her instead? Maybe so. So we have to think about the amount of products we have in the pipeline and that our 'toolbox' has to be bigger and well used."



As Brackenbury said earlier, there are alternatives to the traditional riding format of a launch but it seems that KTM and Priewasser in particular will not budge from the time-honoured yardstick of putting a writer in the saddle.

"I've seen web launches...but at the end of the day if you want to write something about a bike you have to try it," Eva underlines. "I'm not a fan of these static presentations. Of course if you have a lot of messages to tell – like all the technical stuff for the GT – then it makes sense but otherwise the press wants to get the bike, test it and then write or talk about it. I still think it is the best way aside from national launches and taking a bike to a publication for a 1-1 where you get direct content. Static presentations have a big effect in the first minutes but I think specialist media wants more...and they want the bike."





BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
By Monster Energy







'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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